

Ezra Stiles Ely to Andrew Jackson, January 28, 1829, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

REV. EZRA STILES ELY¹ TO JACKSON.

¹ See vol. III., p. 223n.

Philadelphia, January 28, 1829.

My Dear and Honoured Sir, You will impute, I hope, the liberty which I take in writing to you, to my strong attachment to you, and the earnest desire of my heart that you may prove the best President who ever acted as Chief Magistrate of our nation. My principal design at present is to give you the copy of a letter which I have to-day received from the Rev. Lyman Beecher, D. D. of Boston, the most distinguished divine at present living in Massachusetts, if not in New England: from which you will learn the sentiments of many of the thousands of your friends, and of your countrymen who wish you the highest honour, usefulness, and happiness in your exalted station. I feel confident that both your sense of duty and your desire to gratify a numerous class of your firm supporters, would prevent you from publicly travelling on the Lord's day, *except in a case of mercy or necessity* . If ascending a river in a boat, you would of course, and with propriety, proceed in it; but when on land, if the stage of Monday would carry you in season to the place of destination, I feel confident that you would set an example of resting on the day previous. You are not ignorant of the effect produced by the needless excursion of Mr. Adams, and that will explain to you the letter which follows.

“ Boston Jan. 20. 1829.

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“ *Rev. Dr. Ely, Brother*, A fear has been expressed here that as Genl. Jackson sets out for Congress only till after notified officially of his election, he may be tempted, inadvertently, to ride on the sabbath, at a time when it might injure both us and him greatly: and as you have seen and corresponded with him, I was requested to suggest to you our wish that you would write a line to the General, and put him on his guard in this thing: for as *Nobody* , almost, loved his predecessor, or regrets the election of Jackson, and all seem to be prepared to give him a candid trial, he possesses a fine opportunity by a virtuous and independent example to secure the confidence and affection of all the friends of virtue in the nation. If nothing happens to prevent, I should apprehend that he may become one of the most popular men who have set at helm, and a great blessing to the civil and religious interests of the nation. He possesses a noble opportunity to distinguish himself as a patriot and friend of good men, and not the head of a party. I am affectionately yours, Lyman Beecher .”

This coming from Boston, and one of the most influential men in it, deserves regard; and I rejoice to know that New England will yet be as well pleased with the Patriarch of the Hermitage, as with any former President. We do not wish, dear and honoured Sir, to seem to prescribe your course of conduct. We are not bigots, but believe “the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath.” I have travelled on that day, and expect to do it again, when duty calls; but the papers, unhappily in this instance, *publish* the arrivals of our great men, and do not give the religious public the reasons for their journeying on the sabbath, although they might in some cases be satisfactory to the strictest moralist. It was lately published that Mr. Calhoun arrived, for instance, in Washington on the sabbath, and it created a prejudice against him immediately in many of our citizens. On this subject I need say no more, for I expect this letter will not reach you until you will have arrived in W. I send it to the Hermitage because Dr. Beecher seems to think. with many others, that you will not leave home until the 20th of Feb. next.

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Something of the public voice may be learned from the numerous and most respectable petitions which have lately been sent to Congress on the subject of transporting the mail on the sabbath in the time of peace. I saw one in Albany lately subscribed by 7000 names. We do not wish any national legislation about any holy days or religious matters; but merely that our Government should not instruct their agents to violate the sabbath, [or] set an ungodly example in this matter. [No] civil laws should enforce the religious [obs]ervance of any day; and at the same time no Christian ruler of a Christian people should do violence to his own professed, personal principles.

My wife sends her kind regards to you, and says that she shall feel little interest in W. since the death of your beloved companion. Many who love you, will still regard W. much as you will; as a place of pilgrimage. Old Mrs. Calhoun, the mother-in-law of the Vice President will miss your dear wife more than any one there. She said that she would spend another winter there if you should become President, "that she might see a President who would go to church." When I was there a few years since, several said to me, "Genl. Jackson and Mrs. Calhoun are the only independent characters here."

May the Lord bless and keep you my dear and much esteemed friend.